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ABSTRACT

This combined discussion/bibliography summarizes some of the best information in the field for both those who are conducting the selection interview and those who are being interviewed. It is noted that much of the literature is written from the point of view of business, but materials dealing specifically with the library context are also provided. Information is provided in brief, and interviewers and interviewees are urged to refer to at least some of the full sources listed in the 18-item bibliography of print and audiovisual resources at the end of the pamphlet. Topics touched on for the interviewer include the theory and practice of selection interviews and the principles of a successful interview. Interviewees are offered suggestions on how to prepare for an interview, including questions to ask, where to find information on the library where they are being interviewed, and how to deal with problem questions that are too personal or may be discriminatory. Specific items from the bibliography are cited in appropriate places in the discussion. (BBM)

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# A discussion and annotated bibliography on the selection interview for interviewers and interviewees

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*"On your résumé here it says you have a winning smile. Would you flash it for me, please?"*

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Personnel Administration Section

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A DISCUSSION AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE SELECTION INTERVIEW FOR INTERVIEWERS AND INTERVIEWEES

In any attempt to select the right person for a position there are four ways to gain information. The first is past history; how has the candidate performed until now? The second is the reference check; what opinion do others have of that performance? The third is through psychological testing, and no evidence of that procedure being used for a professional library position has been found in the literature.

The fourth is the selection interview. For some positions a single advertisement may bring in over one hundred responses. The difficult winnowing process is completed, and a small number of candidates come in for interviews. The library's concern is to choose the best person for the job, and ideally the interviewee should also be concerned that the position will be right for her or him.

The purpose of this combined discussion/bibliography is to summarize some of the best information in the field, both for those conducting the selection interview and those being interviewed. The summary is just that: information in brief, and interviewers and interviewees are urged to refer to at least some of the full sources listed in the bibliography at the end of this pamphlet. In the paragraphs that follow, the numbers after the various sources refer to the same number in the bibliography.

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DISCUSSION BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SELECTION INTERVIEWING

Interviewers

There is an extensive amount of excellent literature on how to interview written from the point of view of the business concern seeking new employees. The Moffatt book (13) has helpful suggestions on using what the author calls "cones" in interviewing--beginning with an open focus question, such as "Tell me about your work at _____ library," continuing with a moderate focus question like, "What were your specific assignments as part of the reference unit?", and concluding, if deemed necessary, with a closed focus, direct question--"How much time did you actually spend at the reference desk each week?" A detailed example of a specific interview is given to show what answers to questions indicate in terms of applicant evaluation. The Downs et al item (5) covers more types of interviews than any other--the telephone interview, the focus group interview, etc. It is clear, almost textbook in style, with practice projects at the end of each chapter.

Recommended here as the best single detailed work is Lopez (10), or for a shorter treatment Morgan and Cogger (14). Lopez is often quoted by other books on interviewing and deservedly so; he is extensive and thorough in his coverage of both theory and practice of the four major types of interviews--selection, performance appraisal, problem employee, and termination. Morgan and Cogger are succinct and clear, with many sample forms for the practical advice given. A good transfer of these business principles to a library context is in the article by Creth (4).

Some audiovisual presentations are listed in the bibliography (6, 10, 17). The package provided by Drake Beam (16) (formerly Psychological Corporation) is worthwhile. Mr. Drake's occasional slurring of words may turn some listeners off, but the clear discussion of common mistakes, the contrasting good and bad interviews, and what is called "the hypothesis method" of asking the individual to explain in her/his own words the how or why of a fact and making a hypothesis on how that individual will perform based on the total of such explanations, adds something new to the book recommendations listed in the previous paragraph.

In brief, the principles of a successful interview are as follows. (a) The interviewer knows not only the requirements of the job to be filled but also what kind of person can best fill them in the particular library context. An individual who will be put into a participatory management situation will need to be different from one in a tightly structured, authoritarian environment. (b) The interview should be organized in the sense that there is an overall plan. The usual formula is to establish rapport get information--about the position to be filled, library hours, policies, etc.; and finally ask for questions. (c) The interviewer should know the skills of the trade. Do not telegraph the response expected--"Did you play any leadership roles in your past experience?" Ask questions that

insure that the applicant will talk more than the interviewer (see any of the recommended books for samples). Do not, by word or tone of voice, show disagreement or judgement on what is being said--you want the candidate to discuss beliefs and philosophy freely. (d) The interviewer must be familiar with questions that should not be asked because they might be discriminatory under EEOC and/or state or local guidelines. Lopez (10) discusses the theoretical background of this matter quite well, and Moffatt (13), on pp. 142 - 147, has a useful side by side list of illegal questions and legal alternatives.

In sum, the interviewer is trying to find out (a) can this person do the job--are the skills, knowledge, talents and energy there?; (b) will this person do the job--what are her/his motivations?; and (c) does this candidate fit in terms of interpersonal relations with the present staff. While reading and listening to the previously recommended items will help, the best advice is to get all the practice one can. "How to interview" courses are often offered in schools of continuing education, and such organizations as The American Management Association (2); Batten, Batten, Hudson and Swab (6); and Drake Beam and Associates (16) all conduct interview seminars in locations other than their home cities. Actual practice and on the spot critiques that are given are the best way to learn.

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DISCUSSION BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SELECTION INTERVIEWING

Book information for those being interviewed must always begin with Bolles (3). He has many worthwhile things to say about the whole process of choosing a career. As of 1981 the book was being revised annually, so get the latest edition and check the index under "Interviewing." Komar (19) has useful practical advice on good and poor responses to frequently asked questions on pp. 85 - 97. The best single book devoted entirely to the subject is Medley's (12); it is packed with helpful information and is written with the same breezy touch that Bolles employs.

To apply these principles to a library context two publications are recommended--the pamphlet "Interviewing For the Entry Level Library Position" (1), and the article by Margo Trumpeter (18). In the audio visual area a good choice would be the three-part videocassette prepared by the College Placement Council (7), which covers (a) preparation for the interview, (b) the interview itself, and (c) interview follow-up. In cassette (b) two recruiters and a placement officer show excerpts from actual interviews and comment on what was done well and what should have been done differently. The other interviewee item in the bibliography (8) does have useful things to say about turning extra curricular interests into job potential items, but that's such a fringe topic and the film is so high school oriented

that it can only be recommended if it happens to be available locally--don't go out of your way to see it. You might try one of the AV items listed in the bibliography for interviewers simply as preparation for what to expect.

The most important advice given to interviewees is repeated ad infinitum in all the sources listed above. Learn as much as you can about the library before the interview. You are, after all, a potential or actual librarian, so make it your business to do some research about the place where you hope to be employed. Look it up in the American Library Directory, where such items as names of administrators, budget figures, and holdings are given. If you're interested in an academic library, ask for a copy of the college catalog and read it, or at the very least read the section devoted to the library. If a public library position interests you, learn about the city or county served. Candidates should come early for an interview, walk around and observe, and use opportunities to work your research and observations into the interview. The article by Peele (15) gives some specific possible questions that applicants for a reference position might ask, and a little thought should enable you to do the same for any vacancy. If you can show the library you are interested you will leave a positive impression.

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Important point number two is summed up in the old Scout motto, "be prepared." Read some of the interviewer's literature and have an answer for some of the questions that are often asked. "Tell me about yourself," says the interviewer, and you should have a response ready--what you've done that you 're proud of, what your goals are in librarianship, why you want this job and why you think you'd do well in it.

An assumption you must make is that the interviewer has talked or will talk to a number of equally qualified-on-paper candidates, so your aim must at least be to try to leave a favorable impression and if possible to stand out. The interviewer, if the advice given in the previous section is followed, will try first to get and then to give information, and your plan should be exactly the same--get first, if you can. The more you know about the requirements of a position to be filled the more clues you will have as to what aspects of your past experience and strengths to emphasize. Medley puts it well when he says that while the interviewer controls the flow of information the interviewee controls the content. Try to find out what they are looking for as soon as you can. Ask for a job description; if you can get it when you confirm your interview appointment so much the better. Concentrate when introductions are made so you learn the interviewer's name; use the old trick of repeating it to help you remember--"How do you do, Mr Davidson." For a higher level position it might be desirable to find out something about your interviewer's professional

interests if you can learn the name in advance. Look her or him up in biographical directories and Library Literature, and if there is a professional publication read it to learn areas of interest.

A problem that may occur is handling a question that you consider personal, or one that you suspect might be discriminatory. Medley (12) gives an example: the married woman candidate who is asked, "Do you plan on having more children?" His advice is not to be aggressively nasty in your response. Say something like, "If I do, I don't feel it would require me to be absent for such a period that it would affect my ability to do the job well." The interviewer has good reason to feel more concern about such questions than you do, since you may appeal to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commision--and Gene Watkins of Drake Beam has said that the general attitude of EEOC about questions brought to it on discrimination has been that "employers are guilty until proven innocent." An interviewer who asks such a question would have to show that it is asked of married male as well as female candidates, and that it has some relevance to the position to be filled.

In conclusion--you should know what your goals are, what your skills are, and should not settle for just any position. You have as much right to reject a job that doesn't meet your needs as the potential employer has not to select you. Read Bolles (3); he has sensible words and even practical exercises covering those aspects of job hunting.

DISCUSSION BIBLIOGRAPHY ON SELECTION INTERVIEWING

Taking an unwanted position just to break into the field has been done--see How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying (11) for a humorous look--but it cannot be recommended. For every success story there must be many examples of people stuck in jobs they hate. You can only do yourself and your new employer a great disservice by accepting a position that does not match the skills you have worked so hard to develop.

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16. "Selection Interviewing Cassette Program." A package consisting of 6 audiocassettes, a trainer's guide, 10 interviewing exercise workbooks, and a text by John Drake, Interviewing for Managers, American Management Associations, 1972. Available for purchase only from: Drake Beam, 277 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017. The OLPR office (for address see the first item above) has cassettes 3 and 4 and the workbook available for loan.

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